

December 26, 2004

Freedom

Watch

Combined Forces Command - Afghanistan





Spc. Cheryl Ransford

Rock on!

Actor and musician Henry Rollins (center left) and actor Patrick Kilpatrick (right) sign autographs and take photos with service members at Bagram Air Base before heading out to visit troops at forward locations during a four-day USO tour in Afghanistan. "The quality of people you meet out here is extraordinary," said Rollins. "Anything I can do to lift the spirits of the troops is a good thing."

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Spec. Bill Fitzpatrick, 707th Explosive Ordnance Company team member, conducts a pre-combat inspection of an M-107 .50 caliber sniper rifle before departing on a mission. The EOD team uses the rifle to detonate explosives from a safe distance while working throughout Afghanistan to eliminate weapons caches and unexploded ordnance.

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Freedom Watch

Freedom Watch is the weekly publication of Combined Forces Command – Afghanistan.

CFC-A Commander – Lt. Gen. David Barno
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Holiday greetings from the commander, CFC-A

I want to wish each and every one of you serving in Afghanistan and throughout our Central Asia battlespace during the holidays this year a season full of blessings. Every member of Combined Forces Command – Afghanistan should take huge pride in our accomplishments over this past year – a historic period which has seen the birth of a new nation in Afghanistan. Each of you have personally contributed to that tremendous mission success and I am hugely proud of every one of you serving your country in this distant land!

Your service here in Afghanistan – representing the United States and our 19 Coalition partners – truly epitomizes the spirit of this season as you continue to bring peace and hope to the people of Afghanistan. This past year has seen the signing of a new Afghan Constitution, the registration of 10.5 million Afghans

to vote, and the election and Inauguration of President Karzai as 8.5 million Afghans went to the polls and rejected threats against them from around the country. We too can be inspired and motivated by the courage of the Afghan people as they carve out a democracy from a land which has suffered immensely over 25 years of war. Each of you has a part in this historic transformation of Afghan society, and it is a story you should tell your spouses and parents, children and grandchildren – you surely have served here and were “present at the Creation” of a new nation – and you have made a difference.

Let us not forget our comrades who have fallen during this past year. Their service and sacrifice will not be forgotten, and their legacy will be that of a free and democratic Afghanistan where terrorists can no longer stage their ruthless attacks against innocent people around the world. We cherish their memories and count knowing them among our truly great blessings. Let’s remember them and their families as we celebrate this season.

Finally, as you share this holiday season with your military family here far from home, I would ask you to remember all of our blessings and the very important reasons we have been called here to serve in this remote land. Our families and friends depend on our commitment to the mission to keep our homelands safe, and we will not let them down. Most people just read about history –



you are here to make it!

Please pass on to your families at home my thanks and my warmest wishes for a joyous holiday season wherever they may be. Their sacrifices are no less important than ours, and they deserve our utmost admiration and respect for their selfless contribution to this noble and just undertaking.

So again, my best wishes to all of you for a wonderful holiday season. Watch out for each other and keep driving on to the final objective!

David W. Barno
LTG, United States Army
Commanding



Spc. Jaime L. Toppe

Gimme five!

Spc. David A. Patton, Sr., Co. B 113th Support Bn., Indiana National Guard, visits with children at Tangi Kala village. Patton's battalion is working with the village to provide electricity, water and health care. Patton was part of a group that delivered several boxes of school supplies, toys, clothing, and shoes donated from numerous organizations and individuals.

On your mark...



Deployed troops run 'Honolulu Marathon'

Story by Master Sgt. Terry Anderson
CJTF-76 Public Affairs Office

Photos by Sgt. Stephanie L. Carl

Runners begin the "Honolulu Marathon" at FOB Ripley Dec. 12. The race was sponsored by 2nd Bn., 5th Inf. Rgt., and was run by entrants operating throughout Afghanistan.

FORWARD OPERATING BASE RIPLEY, Afghanistan — Running in his first marathon with limited training, 1st Lt. Mike Baskin beat the field Dec. 12 in a race held in the birthplace of the Taliban in southern Afghanistan.

One hundred and ninety one service members and civilians completed the "Honolulu Marathon" at Forward Operating Base Ripley. Runners traveled to FOB Ripley from all over Afghanistan, arriving by helicopter early on the morning of the race.

"I wasn't actually supposed to be here to run it," said Baskin, the acting company commander for Company A, 2nd Battalion, 5th Infantry Regiment. "Our company commander is on leave and I wasn't supposed to leave Forward Operating Base Anaconda, but I worked it out with our battalion commander, and here I am."

Baskin, a 24-year old California native, finished the 26.2 miles in 3 hours, 12 minutes and 16 seconds, more than 15 minutes ahead of second place runner and friend, Capt. Ian Grimstead.

Spc. Jill Stevens was the first female runner to cross the finish line in 3 hours, 45 minutes and 20 seconds, placing her seventh overall.

Grimstead and Baskin joked with each other about who was going to win the race, said Baskin.

"But we all came out and our main goal was to have fun. It's something non-mis-

sion related that we've enjoyed," he said.

The "Bobcats" of 2nd Bn., 5th Inf. Rgt., hosted the marathon, provided logistical support for the race and coordinated for every finisher to receive a T-shirt, a medal and a shell lei.

Artillerymen from 3rd Battalion, 7th Field Artillery Regiment fired the cannon that began the race. Engineers from the 65th Engineer Battalion assisted in flattening the run route prior to the race.

The runners had to run the perimeter of the base five times, battling a hill dubbed "mini-Diamond Head" halfway around the airfield, a callback to a grueling summit runners of the actual Honolulu Marathon must endure. An unexpected rain shower the night before kept the dust down, but made parts of the course muddy. The base is at 4,400 feet in elevation and the thin mountain air presented a challenge to all the runners.

The run course consisted of gravel and rock, adding to the race's difficulty. Palm trees made of wood decorated the run route to remind the service members of their home base in Hawaii, helping the runners to endure the grueling monotony of the race.

Part of the excitement of participating in the marathon was the possibility of direct or indirect attacks by insurgents, attacks that never materialized.

"Running a marathon in Afghanistan is

interesting," said Stevens, a medic with 1st Battalion, 211th Aviation Regiment, before completing what was her fifth marathon. "It is a combat zone and you've got to be careful where you step, but I'll be proud and honored to finish a marathon in Afghanistan."



1st Lt. Mike Baskin, Co. A, 2nd Bn., 5th Inf. Rgt., crosses the finish line at 3 hours and 12 minutes, winning the race.

Contractors aid orphans with winter donations

Story and photo by
Air Force 2nd Lt. Michael Sheley
455th Expeditionary Operations Group

CHARIKAR, Afghanistan — The excitement in the eyes of the Afghan children was mirrored in the faces of two American civilians as a truck carrying bags full of winter shoes backed into the orphanage courtyard in Charikar village.

Donations received from the 455th Air Expeditionary Wing Flag Flying program ensured that more than 300 orphans living in Charikar will have warm shoes as winter approaches the mountainous region near Bagram Air Base.

The sight of orphans coming up one-by-one to receive their shoes warmed the heart of Barry McKelvy who runs the flag flying for donation program that raised the money for the shoes.

The Air Force Contract Augmentation Program airfield manager raised more than \$300 in donations since September, flying flags over the air traffic control tower on Bagram Air Base. The money from these donations is used to purchase items for children residing in three different orphanages.

Local interpreters who work on base volunteered to purchase the items from local shops. The donated items are made in Afghanistan, which helps the local

economy and ensures that 100 percent of the program's funds benefit the children.

When McKelvy took over the flag flying program to create souvenirs for friends and family back home, he never imagined that it would lead him "outside the wire" to local orphanages.

"All the kiddos are so cute, I wish I could take some of them home with me," said the retired Airmen.

Mili Suits, who works with McKelvy in airfield management and accompanied him on the orphanage visit, was born in Lima, Peru, but calls Manassas, Va., home.

"These children remind me of the children back in Peru ... how poverty stricken people can be, but they still make it in life," she said. "It's nice to see children. Their innocence is irreplaceable."



Barry McKelvy, Air Force Contract Augmentation Program airfield manager, hands a bag of winter shoes to a young Charikar villager. Funds for the footwear were raised through the flag flying program.

It was the first road trip outside of the base for both McKelvy and Suits, who are working in Afghanistan with AFCAP for a second year.

"We've been here over a year and this is our first chance to get outside the base and see how the local people are living," said Suits. "It reminds us why we are here, to help these people."

Next time, McKelvy plans to give the children toys.

"I want to give these children something they want," said McKelvy, "instead of something they need."

Enduring Voices

What is your New Year's resolution going to be?



Spc. Matthew Baumann
Co. A, 2nd Bn., 35th Inf. Rgt.
"My New Year's resolution is to make the most out of my military career."



Sgt. Chris Russell
HHC, 2nd Bn., 35th Inf. Rgt.
"I want to stop drinking soda."



1st Sgt. John Kennedy
Co. B, 926th Eng. Bn.
"To spend more quality time with my family and make up for this year away."



Maj. Steve Howell
HHC, CTF Bronco
"To narrow my focus on what's most important in my life."

MPs render first aid to injured Afghan family

Story and photo by
Sgt. Jennifer S. Emmons
17th Public Affairs Detachment

WARDAK PROVINCE, Afghanistan — The radio in the vehicle crackled to life. “Warlord One, this is Warlord Six, over.” “Six, this is One, over.” “Turn around. Did you see that truck in the ditch? Let’s see what we can do.” “Roger.”

The Soldiers, on their way to the Ghazni Provincial Reconstruction Team in central Afghanistan after a mission in Wardak province, called the tactical operations center at the PRT to inform their leaders they were turning around. The Soldiers on the convoy had spotted a family of Afghans stranded on the side of the road beside their totaled pickup.

The truck had been speeding, blew a tire and rolled off the road, injuring the occupants and destroying the truck, said Staff Sgt. Stephan Mudge, 25th Military Police Company.

Seeing the damaged vehicle and the family next to it, the Soldiers, who were qualified as combat lifesavers, thought they could help and stopped to lend a hand.

“One of the people had already been taken to the hospital with some pretty severe injuries,” said Spc. Paul Lamb, 25th MP Co. “The other family members who

just had small cuts and bruises were still sitting beside the vehicle.”

Although the most seriously injured was already being taken care of, the people with less severe injuries still needed help.

“We cleaned up a few cuts and put band-aids on the little boy, and the man and woman,” said Lamb.

Due to cultural concerns, the MPs were glad a female Soldier was on the patrol to assist the female Afghan.

“Culturally, it’s important for men not to have too much contact with women,” said Mudge. “Fortunately, we had a female Soldier with us to do a more thorough exam to make sure there were no serious neck injuries.”

The Soldiers also flagged down a passing ambulance near the scene of the accident.

“The person driving the ambulance happened to be the minister of health for



Staff Sgt. Stephan Mudge (left) and Spc. Paul Lamb, both of the 25th MP Co., render aid to an Afghan family after the family had a vehicle accident in Wardak province.

Ghazni province, so he was able to help move the people to the doctor,” said Mudge.

The MPs who responded to the accident provided yet another benefit to the Afghans.

“All the Soldiers in the platoon are combat lifesaver qualified,” he said

The Soldiers knew what they were doing and made a significant impact.

See MPs, Page 15



Staff Sgt. Monica R. Garreau

Photo with the chairman

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Air Force Gen. Richard Myers, poses for a photo with Coalition service members at Bagram Air Base. Myers accompanied a USO group on a tour through the CENTCOM area of operations in time to bring some holiday cheer to the service members deployed in support of Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom.

Soccer gives Afghans positive outlet

Story and photo by
Sgt. Jeremy A. Clawson
105th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

LASHKAR GAH, Afghanistan — For leaders in Helmund province in southern Afghanistan, soccer is more than merely a fun pastime for youth.

Soccer is being used to give young men a positive outlet and wholesome source of entertainment to share with others.

The Lashkar Gah Minister of Sports, Mohammed Gaus, recently approached Maj. Reginald Truss, 450th Civil Affairs Battalion, at the Lashkar Gah Provincial Reconstruction Team headquarters, to inquire about sports equipment for a proposed soccer league.

By building a soccer league, local leaders will give youth a sense of belonging and purpose, replacing idle hours with a focus on teamwork and fitness.

Truss and his command agreed the positive message justified funding the project. The CA team spent \$16,000 outfitting not only 25 soccer teams with balls, nets and cleats, but also 25 volleyball teams and 25 cricket teams.

The civil affairs Soldiers hope the men's league does well and would like to start a women's league as well.

"Long term I hope Mohammed Gaus also introduces sports to the girls as well," said Truss.

To bring the community together in a show of solidarity, Gaus and Truss

arranged to have a local soccer team play against Soldiers from the Lashkar Gah PRT.

"The game came about to convey ... that we (U.S. Soldiers) are human and like to have a good time," said Truss.

At the game, held at the Lashkar Gah Sports Complex in Karzai Stadium, the civil affairs team also provided a public announcement system.



Sgt. Andy Grentz, 209th MP Company, goes after the ball during a soccer game in Lashkar Gah.

The PRT Commander, Marine Lt. Col. Eugene Augustine, spoke to the crowd of more than 500 spectators before the soccer game began.

"You are the future of Afghanistan. Education, democracy and hard work are the future of Afghanistan," said Augustine.

The Soldiers who played soccer against

the Afghan team were force protection and civil affairs Soldiers from the PRT, and members of the 209th Military Police Company.

This event was a great opportunity for the Soldiers and a chance to give to the community, said Truss.

"This also gives our force protection guys something fun," he said.

"I hope this pulls the community together as far as not always hearing bad news. This is a good news event that was generated by Afghans and Americans, and we hope to do more events like this to pull the community together."

Truss says he expects a broader group of children and young adults to have greater access to the world of sports with the PRT providing sports equipment, enabling Afghans to enhance existing sports programs and start new ones.

"The soccer match was indeed a success," said Mouadeen, the Helmand chief of staff.

"The community was very excited about the televised game and many talked about it that week. It showed the community how unified the PRT and local government officials have become to make Afghanistan a successful country," said Mouadeen. "The soccer match gave a big blow to anti-Coalition forces and their efforts to convince the local populace that the PRT does not belong in their community."



PHOTOS FROM THE FIELD

Two students take a break from learning in Zair Som at one of three new schools in the Kahmard district of Bamian province. The Bamian Provincial Reconstruction Team supplied students with stationery kits at the school's grand opening, and revisited it the following day to observe classes in progress.

*Photo by New Zealand 1st Lt. Mike Shepherd
Bamian PRT*

If you have high quality photos of service members supporting the Coalition mission or enjoying well-deserved off-duty time, please e-mail them to carls@baf.afgn.army.mil. Please include full identification and caption information, including who is in the photo and what action is taking place.

EOD team destroys weapons one cache at a time

Story and photos by Sgt. Frank Magni
17th Public Affairs Detachment

JALALABAD PROVINCIAL RECONSTRUCTION TEAM, Afghanistan — After nearly 30 years of war, Afghanistan is full of left over munitions from the Soviet occupation and the unrest that followed until the Coalition ousted the Taliban in October 2001.

With rockets, mortars and mines littering virtually every corner of the country, eliminating these hazards has become a huge concern for Coalition forces and the Afghan government.

Multiple EOD teams are spread throughout the country responding to the calls for support. These teams can be found everywhere from main installations like Bagram Air Base, to the most remote forward operating bases.

"We are out here every day to make this country safe for military and locals," said Spc. Bill Fitzpatrick, 707th Explosive Ordnance Disposal Company EOD specialist.

Fitzpatrick, along with fellow team member Sgt. Jerod Harding and team



Sgt. Frank Magni

Staff Sgt. Miles Cathers, 707th Explosive Ordnance Disposal Co. team leader, controls a robot the team uses to safely examine hazardous items.

leader Staff Sgt. Miles Cathers, operate in and around Nangahar province in eastern Afghanistan in support of multiple coalition units.

Having a three-member team is somewhat unique for EOD, but it reduces the strain of the mission by having an extra person to assist with the myriad of tasks EOD Soldiers are responsible for.

"It is like a crap shoot for us," said Cathers. "One day we might be destroying the contents of a cache, the next we might have to disable a bomb in a village."

Employing equipment from robots to sniper rifles, the tools each team has to do their job are as numerous as the tasks themselves.

Whether it is rendering unexploded ordnance "safe," or blowing it in place, the first level of decision-making falls to the team leader on the scene.

Working with unit leadership, an EOD team leader is always the primary ordnance adviser in an area. Helping leaders balance decisions and giving the best estimates possible on the risk of detonation to personnel and equipment, makes the team leader's job demanding.

Cathers is on his third deployment to Afghanistan, and the leaders he works with trust his advice.

"I tell the leader 'these are the things we can do,'" he said. "Many leaders I work with go directly off the advice I give."

With extensive experience in EOD operations within the country, Cathers said he relies heavily on his training and approaches each mission using two tools

— experience and a careful thought process.

With the variety of different scenarios each team can encounter, all EOD personnel are sent into a situation with years of experience from throughout the field of EOD personnel. The experience is bolstered with updated doctrine that is used to assess each scenario.

"Everything we do has precedents," said Cathers. "We never go into a situation without knowing how a piece of ordnance works."

But experience and doctrine is only one part of the equation for the EOD team — the next is problem solving.

"There is no such thing as a cookie cutter mission," said Cathers. Every EOD Soldier must be prepared to think on their feet and adapt to the situation.

The key attribute to making a successful on-the-spot decision is common sense.

"We have to be very good problem solvers," said Cathers. "We aren't just 'John Wayneing' it out there. We think every problem through."

In Afghanistan, the team's approach is simple.

"If anything is unsecured, we take care of it right there," said Fitzpatrick. "If not, it could possibly come back as a roadside bomb."

They also prioritize the ordnance found in each cache with the same mindset.

"We destroy the items that can be used against Coalition forces first," said Fitzpatrick.



Sgt. Jerod Harding, 707th EOD Co. team member, takes digital photographs of a weapons cache for use in estimating the amount of explosives necessary for destroying the ordnance.

TF 168 brothers enjoy holiday at home

Story and photo by
Staff Sgt. Monica R. Garreau
17th Public Affairs Detachment

BAGRAM AIR BASE, Afghanistan — Soldiers serving in a combat environment often refer to their fellow service members as family. When one of Task Force 168's three Schon brothers say it, they aren't just spouting a figure of speech.

The three brothers — Staff Sgt. Mike Schon, Staff Sgt. Scott Schon and Spc. Tony Schon — deployed to Afghanistan together in May with their Iowa National Guard unit, based in their hometown of Carroll, Iowa.

Their mission is to provide force protection to provincial reconstruction teams throughout the country. But their family members back home would probably tell you that their mission is to provide support to each other while they're deployed here for a year.

The brothers communicate via e-mail at least once a week. They share experiences, family stories and provide basic moral support to each other.

"It's nice to talk to people who are doing the same stuff," said 27-year-old Scott.

"They're sitting there in our same shoes," echoed 30-year-old Mike.

"You can talk to family different than you can talk to someone else," added 20-year-old Tony.

But the best conversations are those held in person, said the brothers. Especially when all three Schons were able to travel home on R&R leave, for Thanksgiving, as a family. The timing was by chance — at Mike's PRT, names and dates were drawn out of a hat, and Scott and Tony were able to select the same timeframe — but all three said it would have been special regardless of when they went home, as long as they were together.

"We just celebrated Christmas and Thanksgiving together," said Scott who is assigned to the Jalalabad PRT in eastern Afghanistan.

The brothers were greeted at the airport in Omaha, Neb., by their immediate family, which includes another three brothers and two sisters, wives and children (Mike and Scott), a girlfriend (Tony), and their large extended family.

"Someone joked that half of Omaha was here," said Mike who is assigned to



Above: Spc. Tom Schon (left) and Staff Sgts. Mike and Scott Schon, all of TF 168, barter with a vendor for their ride atop a camel at the Bagram bazaar Dec. 10. The three brothers returned to Bagram from their two weeks of R&R leave, which they took together in their native Iowa.

the Tarin Kowt PRT in southern Afghanistan.

"It was just one big welcome home. Our parents, all our families were just ecstatic when we all came out the gate together," said Scott. "They couldn't have been happier."

The Schons spent their two weeks catching up with each other and other family members. They also spent time introducing themselves to a new addition to the family — Mike's daughter Taylor Ann was born on Sept. 11.

"Our parents, all our families were just ecstatic when we all came out the gate together."

The Schon family has always been very close — they drove to Fort Hood, Texas, in an RV to see the boys off before they flew to Afghanistan — but through the challenges of a year-long deployment, they have grown even closer, said Scott.

"This seemed like no other (Thanksgiving) that I've been to," he said. "There was this special undertone that everyone seemed to appreciate this one more than any other past holiday. No one had to say anything, you just

kind of knew it."

The three deployed Schons have grown even closer as well.

"You won't really be able to tell until this is all over, but it seems like it has (strengthened our relationship) just from these past two weeks," said Mike.

Being in the same unit has the potential to strain a relationship, but the trio said they have not given in to feelings of sibling rivalry. Instead, they look up to each other and learn from what the others are doing at their respective PRTs.

"I'm really glad they're here, because I can just e-mail them and ask them a question or get advice about something," said Tony who is assigned to the Asadabad PRT in eastern Afghanistan.

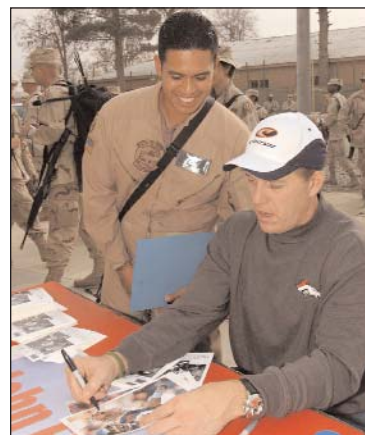
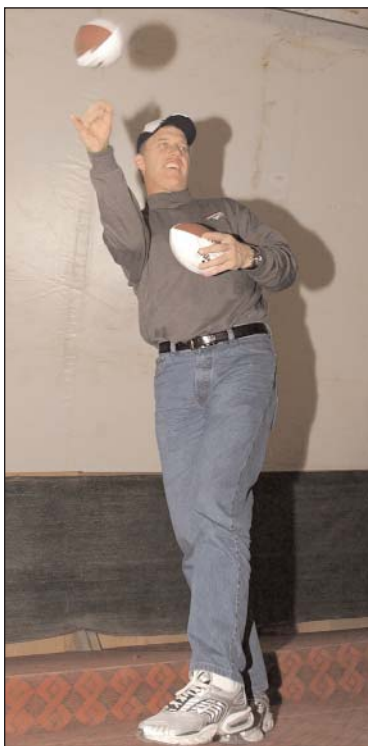
Although their family isn't exactly thrilled with the idea of three of their boys deployed at the same time, they understand that being in the same country provides some comfort for them. It also means that once the deployment is over, all three will return together, providing the opportunity for another Schon family reunion.

"They just felt reassured when we left together," said Tony. "Reassured that we're doing some of the same things over here."

USO tour brings joy, celebrities



A USO-sponsored morale tour stopped at Bagram Air Base Dec. 16 to provide service members deployed here some holiday cheer. Members of the tour included actor and comedian Robin Williams, former Denver Broncos Quarterback John Elway, cover model Leeann Tweeden, and actor Blake Clark. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Air Force Gen. Richard Myers accompanied the tour, which also made a stop at Kanadahar Airfield.



Photos by Staff Sgt. Monica R. Garreau
Clockwise from top: Tweeden signs a magazine for Spc. Isaac Nahakuelua. Elway autographs a picture for Sgt. Ernie Lazos. Service members reach for an autographed football thrown by Elway. Elway tosses autographed footballs into the crowd. Clark entertains the audience with comedy.

Commo team keeps Soldiers connected

Story by Spc. Cheryl Ransford
17th Public Affairs Detachment

SHINDAND AIRFIELD, Afghanistan — Keeping service members across Afghanistan connected is no small task for signal Soldiers.

One small team of Soldiers has done their part by providing the personnel at Shindand Airfield in southwestern Afghanistan with the ability to communicate with each other.

Since arriving in Shindand, the communications team has not only maintained the communications equipment in 125 tactical vehicles, but has also installed 10 Internet connections on base, said Sgt. 1st Class Joe Belew, Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 3rd Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment.

The team also installed the equipment necessary for Soldiers to enjoy the American Forces Network in the morale, welfare and recreation tent, the dining facility and the gym.

Staying up to date on current events and staying in touch with family are important for Soldiers' morale.

Keeping personnel connected is what communications is all about, said Sgt. Michael Ridling, HHT, 3rd Sqdn., 4th Cav. Rgt.

"If the Soldiers aren't talking, the mission can't be completed," he said. "Whether they are staying in touch with loved ones, keeping their morale high, or communicating with each other during a mission, without the equipment we provide and keep running, they wouldn't be able to do any of it."

Along with providing communications for 3rd Sqdn., 4th Cav. Rgt., the 13-member team provided and maintained communications for all of Regional Command West before Task Force Longhorn was established to command the units in the western region of Afghanistan.

"Prior to October, our job was much more extensive than it is now," said Belew. "Not only were the guys responsible for the communications in and out of Shindand, but also all communications at Chaqcharan, Herat and Farah."

While they are still providing support to all four locations, they now have addi-



Spc. John McGregor

Sgt. Jacob Wilhoite (left) and Sgt. Michael Ridling, HHT 3rd Sqdn., 4th Cav. Rgt., set up a tactical satellite antenna at Shindand Airfield.

tional assistance from TF Longhorn.

"Even though we still control the communications in Shindand, it has made our mission easier to accomplish in the other areas now that we are receiving support from Longhorn," said Belew.

"We are responsible for close to a fifth of Afghanistan," he said. "Even though the job was getting done, it's nice to know there is someone else out there to help accomplish the long term goals of the Coalition mission."

Dari/Pashto phrase of the week



Afghan cultural tidbit

Dari

Thank you

Tash akur (tash-a-kure)

You're welcome

Kabele tash akur neist

(kah-beh-lee-tash-a-kure neist)

Pashto

Thank you

Manuna (mah-noo-nah)

You're welcome

panua na leiri (pah-noo-ah nah leir-ee)

Mazar-e sharif (tomb of the chosen one) is a cultural landmark in northern Afghanistan where the tomb of Hazrat Ali, Prophet Mohammed's son-in-law and fourth leader of Islam, is located. Every year, on March 21, a flag is raised here to celebrate the new year, and people from all over Afghanistan come to take part in the cultural and religious gathering. It is believed that if the blind attend the flag raising, and wait for about 10 days, their sight will be restored.

Tropic Lightning Band delivers Christmas spirit

Story and photos by Spc. Dijon Rolle
17th Public Affairs Detachment

AFGHANISTAN — Soldiers of the 25th Infantry Division (Light) Tropic Lightning Band toured several remote forward operating bases before the holidays, bringing with them a healthy dose of holiday spirit for troops serving far away from home.

The tour featured the “Lightning Rock Band” and a brass quintet.

The groups of musicians traveled separately, performing concerts throughout the country. They played everything from classic rock to traditional military and holiday favorites.

The Soldier-musicians made a special effort to visit troops serving at remote firebases like Lagman, Ripley and Anaconda.

“We want to build troop morale, especially during this time of year,” said Staff Sgt. Mark Valentino, Tropic Lightning Band rock band noncommissioned officer in charge.

“To go out here and play music for these guys who may not get any entertainment at all, and are far away from home, is important. We play for them and try to give them something they can take with them,” he said. “We want them to have a good time.”

The tour originally kicked off in Kirkuk, Iraq, in early November, where the band



Soldiers at FOB Ripley listen as the Tropic Lightning Band performs Christmas and contemporary music at their base during the band’s tour of forward operating bases in Afghanistan.

played for Tropic Lightning Soldiers serving in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The musicians have been performing for Coalition forces throughout Afghanistan since late November, helping to boost morale for those serving in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

“The music brings something familiar to the Soldiers. Hopefully it will touch them and make them feel good,” said Sgt. Robert Chapa, Tropic Lightning Band keyboard player.

Coalition forces agree the music is a welcome diversion from everyday operations. And it’s a morale booster during the holiday season.

“It was great. There aren’t many recreational activities at the firebases,” said Spc. Joshua Thomas, Co. B, 926th Engineer Battalion, carpenter.

“Their visit was right on time — especially since the holidays are here and we’re away from our families. It was uplifting to have everybody participating, dancing and just having a good time. I think it brought everybody together,” he said.

“Yeah, this was definitely good for morale and for the Soldiers, overall,” said Sgt. 1st Class Marcus Macon, Co. C, 65th Engineer Battalion (attached to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 35th Infantry Regiment), platoon sergeant.

“This time of year, we try to keep an even closer eye on our

Soldiers and do our best to keep morale high,” he said. “We come together and take care of each other. We’re a family.”

The band plans to wrap up its eight-week holiday tour early next year with a final concert in Forward Operating Base Asadabad. In addition to their concerts at the firebases, the band also performed for troops serving at Bagram Air Base and Kandahar Airfield, and various locations in Kabul.



Sgt. Tanzonia Lakes of the Lightning Rock Band sings for Soldiers at FOB Ripley.



Staff Sgt. Roger Shattuck, performs Christmas and contemporary music at Firebase Lagman during a tour of PRTs and FOBs during the holiday season.

Proper clothing ensures good health

Safeguarding the Coalition

Story and photo by
Sgt. Stephanie L. Carl
17th Public Affairs Detachment

AFGHANISTAN — For every hazard to the safety of Coalition personnel, there are more than enough ways to take the hazard out of play.

Some of the dangers are very serious, life- and limb-threatening afflictions, and others are as simple as the common cold and influenza that flare up as temperatures plummet.

Both the cold and flu are easily prevented with responsible actions by individuals, and proper supervision by leadership.

"The biggest problems we see at sick call right now are the common cold and flu," said Sgt. Robert W. Bruce, 528th Engineer Battalion medical noncommissioned officer in charge. "I see about 12 or 13 Soldiers a day at sick call for one of these two things."

With the varying and extreme condi-

tions troops are exposed to in Afghanistan, service members are even more susceptible to these two maladies. But it doesn't take much to protect against them.

The first, most basic protection available, and required, is the flu shot.

"People will ask me why they need to get a flu shot every year," said Bruce. "The answer is that there is a different strain of the flu every year."

Another preventive measure is proper protection against the elements.

"I always see people out running early in the morning with nothing covering their face," said Bruce.

Covering the nose and mouth, and wearing long pants, are two easy ways to filter bacteria from the dust in the air and stay warm.

Service members in the field and on con-

voys are especially at risk against the elements. The best thing they can do is bundle up against the cold.

"I see the convoys rolling out every day, and the gunners in the turrets are always dressed properly," said Bruce. "It shows. I haven't treated a single gunner yet for a cold or flu."

Leaders play a big role in ensuring their Soldiers protect themselves against illness.

"Leaders need to ensure their Soldiers are dressing properly," said Bruce. "At the same time, they need to realize that every individual has different tolerance levels."

While one service member may be comfortable in a T-shirt, another Soldier may require multiple layers in the same conditions.

Another basic precaution against com-



Extreme conditions during the winter months in Afghanistan can have an adverse effect on the health of service members. Leaders ensuring their troops are wearing the proper clothing, like this turret gunner, will help eliminate illnesses in the field.

mon illnesses is proper personal hygiene. Hand washing and covering sneezes are two of the main ways to prevent the spread of bacteria from person to person.

For Soldiers in the field, hand-wash stations may not always be available. But there are alternatives.

"Hand sanitizer works great," said Staff Sgt. Marvin Kelley, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Combined Task Force Bronco, battle noncommissioned officer. "Even if you can't wash your hands, you can sanitize them. Soldiers are constantly touching the same equipment and vehicles. That's one of the fastest ways germs are spread."

Wearing clean uniforms also prevents against colds and flus.

"Leaders should make sure they are allowing their Soldiers to do things like

change their socks and T-shirts in the field," said Kelley. "People don't realize how much bacteria is in the sand out here, not to mention bugs that carry their own bacteria and diseases."

Proper hydration is also a main defense against getting sick.

"People tend to forget about drinking water during the winter months," said Bruce. "But this is one of the best ways to prevent illness, and it's about the only thing that will help speed up the healing process if you do get sick."

The only other thing that cures the flu or a cold is time, he said. But medics can provide medications to ease the symptoms.

The symptoms between the two are very similar, with one exception — body aches.

"If you have a flu, your whole body will hurt," said Bruce.

A cold is characterized by runny nose, coughing, sore throat, irritability, ear aches and sensitive eyes. There are medications available to treat each of these symptoms.

"But medications can take up to 72 hours to start working," said Bruce.

Additionally, the medics can only provide these medications if a service member lets them know

there is a problem.

"Soldiers need to come to sick call as soon as they have a problem," he said.

Supervisors should also pay close attention to their troops.

"Squad leaders know their people," said Bruce. "They know when someone's not feeling well, and they need to make sure they come to sick call."

If a service member doesn't get treated, the mission may be adversely affected.

"A sick Soldier isn't as alert as they normally would be," said Kelley. "I'm not effective if I don't have my whole team, and a Soldier doesn't do me any good if he's not 100 percent."

"I always tell my Soldiers, 'People always stress weapons maintenance, but there's also personal maintenance, and that comes first.'"

Training prepares Soldiers for close combat

Story and photos by
Spc. Cheryl Ransford
17th Public Affairs Detachment

HERAT, Afghanistan — While maintaining Soldier skills is important for everyone in a combat environment, those skills can mean the difference between succeeding or failing at the mission at hand.

Effective close quarters weapons firing is one of those skills.

Utilizing cover, firing while moving and moving a casualty to cover were the focus of a close quarters range conducted last month in Herat by the Soldiers of Task Force 168.

"The purpose of the range was to give the Soldiers the impression of what it feels like to fire their weapons at a man-sized target under stress," said 2nd Lt. Ross Niebur, TF 168 platoon leader.

While the Soldiers haven't encountered the enemy in close quarters, they know someday they may. The primary role of the Soldiers of TF 168 is to provide security and force protection for civil affairs personnel.

"We do a lot of security for the CA team, and knowing how to protect them and ourselves is an invaluable skill," said Staff Sgt. Bradley Bergeman, TF 168



Spc. Michael Elmer pulls Sgt. Duane Seibert to cover during a close quarters range in Herat. The range was designed for infantrymen to practice fire and movement techniques under realistic combat conditions on the battlefield in close combat with the enemy.

squad leader. "Without doing training exercises every chance we get, we could forget one step that would make everything go wrong."

During the range, the Soldiers were given three scenarios they are likely to encounter on a mission.

The range was designed to be as realistic as possible, without having someone returning fire. It was tailored to the types of security the Soldiers provide during missions, said Niebur.

"By using vehicles and ruins for the scenarios at the range, we were able to demonstrate to the Soldiers how they have to move and where to go to get cover," he said. "Those two things, along with knowing how to fire on the move, could possibly save a Soldier's life during an attack."

Even though this type of training was new to the Soldiers, they responded well and were happy to gain the experience.

"Training in this way made sense," said Spc.

Michael Elmer, TF 168. "If we have to use cover in the city, we aren't going to have large areas to hide behind. It's good to be able to know what to expect if the situation arises."

Since most missions require the infantrymen to work with a squad-sized element, the training was designed for that type of scenario, said Bergeman.

"When we go out on missions, we don't use a lot of manpower," he said. "So doing the training with the guys you live and work with made it better for the Soldiers."

The squads of Soldiers took their time to ensure proficiency at the task at hand.

"Training in a small group makes the training more efficient," said Sgt. Clayton Kaufer, TF 168 team leader. "We were able to do more training for each Soldier instead of having to rush everyone through the course."

Even though the Soldiers are conducting missions almost every day, they still make time to maintain their skills, said Niebur.

"We don't get a lot of time to train due to the number of missions we are doing," he said. "But when we do, it's good to know that what the guys are training on is structured for the type of work they are doing."



Staff Sgt. Bradley Bergeman, TF 168 squad leader, fires his M-16A2 rifle while taking cover during the close quarters range.



Sgt. Clayton Kaufer, TF 168, fires his M-16A2 rifle while using a pickup for protection during the close quarters range.

Weapons: EOD destroys munitions, increases safety

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While the approach each Soldier takes to his job remains the same, each has a different reason why he chose EOD.

"I need to know that I've done something important at the end of the day," said Harding. "With EOD, I feel like I'm doing something good every day."

Others on the team feel they were born to do EOD.

"I was always the kid who would take something apart and put it back together again," said Fitzpatrick. "I think this job is a perfect fit for me."

One theme that remains constant in Canter's team is a feeling of brotherhood.

"We are really close," said Cather. "In many ways, I'm trusting my life with a team member. In a way, they feel like brothers to me."

With an overwhelming amount of ordnance surfacing each day, Cathers avoids feeling like there is no end in sight.

"I just take it one mission at a time," he said. "Each time I have left Afghanistan, it has felt like I made the country at least a little bit safer. This time will be no exception."



Sgt. Frank Magni

Sgt. Jerod Harding, 707th EOD Co. team member, replaces the battery in a remote controlled robot. The sophisticated robot enables EOD personnel to remotely examine hazardous items while keeping the team members out of harms way.

MPs: Soldiers' awareness helps family, Coalition bond

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More than the aid the Soldiers provided, they gave the family a good view of the Coalition.

"I think it gave them a positive impression of us," said Mudge. "It lets them know that we are here to help them. We're here to help the people in any way we can, by training the police, helping the government,

or providing assistance if there is a traffic accident."

Assisting people like the Afghan family also benefits the Soldiers.

"Assisting whenever we can helps us in our mission," said Mudge. "These people that we helped will pass on the word that we helped and that we are here to help. It makes it easier to deal with the community. It

also sets a good example for the police."

This situation also brought home another message to the Soldiers, he said.

"This brought back the importance of situational awareness. We always keep our eyes open for possible attacks and (improvised explosive devises). You never know when there might be something we

can do to help the people around us."

The family will recover from their bumps and bruises. And they will remember how Coalition forces took the time to help them when they were in need.

"That wasn't our mission that day," said Lamb. "But we were able to help them. It's good to be able to do things like that."

Letters to the Editor

The *Freedom Watch* would like to publish your opinions on topics of importance and interest to those serving in OEF.

Please send your thoughts in letter form to the editor. All letters e-mailed must include full name, unit, address and, when possible, telephone number. We will not print anonymous letters. Please limit all letters to 200 words or less.

We reserve the right to edit letters for length, clarity and decorum.

Please avoid implying criticism of U.S. or DoD policies and programs, advocating or disputing specific political, diplomatic or legislative matters, or implying criticism of host nation or host nation sensitivities.

Please send your letters to:
stumpc@baf.afgn.army.mil

We look forward to hearing from you!

OEF "Values" Essay Contest

Personnel in Afghanistan are invited to participate in the Operation Enduring Freedom bi-monthly "Values" Essay Contest sponsored by CJTF-76.

The current value is "**Respect**."

Rules

- ☐ Essays should include the definition of the featured value and your own experience(s) that reinforce this value
- ☐ Essays will be at least one and no more than two pages (typed/neatly printed and double-spaced)
- ☐ Please include a cover page with Title, Author's Name, Supervisor's Name, Unit/Organization, Phone Number and e-mail address if available
- ☐ Do not put name directly on essay
- ☐ Submit essays to EO Adviser nearest your location, via e-mail or hard copy by Jan. 10.

The winning essay writer will receive a CJTF-76 Commanding General's Certificate of Achievement and other prizes to be announced. The essay will also be published in a future issue of the *Freedom Watch*, and in the bi-monthly EO Update.

EO is also looking for E-7s and above to help review essay submissions and select the winning essay.

Call the Bagram EO Senior Adviser at DSN 318-231-3021 for more information.

Awareness



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